DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 054 500 CG 006 637

AUTHOR Schlenker, Barry R.; And Others

TITLE Source Esteem, Threat Credibility, and Compliance to Coercive Power Attempts.

INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Albany.

SPONS AGENCY National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE Apr 71

NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at Eastern Psychological Association Annual Meeting (42nd, New York, N. Y., April 15-17, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29

DESCRIPTORS Association (Psychological); Behavior Patterns; *Beliefs; Games; Generalization; *Motivation; Negative Reinforcement; *Response Mode; *Simulation; Social Characteristics; *Social Influences; Social Status

IDENTIFIERS Prisoners Dilemma Game

ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that source esteem would be effective in mediating target compliance when the source uses threats as an influence tactic, particularly if esteemed individuals maintain a facade of truthfulness, because threat credibility would then be overestimated. Threats from a low esteemed source would have lower credibility and lead to infrequent compliance. The experimental paradigm used a message-modified version of the Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG) in which a simulated source could send explicit contingent threats to target subjects during the course of a mixed-motive conflict situation. An experimental confederate first carried out a rehearsed esteem inducement procedure. The game was then played. In the experimental group, 20 threats were sent (as an illuminated light) over 150 game trials, and half the subjects were punished for non-compliance. Subjects then rated the confederate. The subjects were found to comply more frequently in high source esteem conditions irrespective of threat credibility. In low source esteem conditions, subjects complied as a direct function of threat credibility. (KS)

ED054500

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SOURCE ESTEEM, THREAT CREDIBILITY, AND OBEDIENCE TO COERCIVE POWER ATTEMPTS

Barry R. Schlenker, Bob Helm, Ed Varnusky, and Patricia O'Rourke[1]

State University of New York at Albany

Social theorists have long viewed an individual's superior abilities or unique experiences as an important and effective base of social influence. The target's subjective judgment of such expert abilities constitutes his esteem for the source. Studies investigating the effects of source esteem on compliance to social influence have emphasized the influence mode of persuasion, finding a direct relation between esteem and target compliance. The present experiment predicted that source esteem would also be effective in mediating target compliance when the source uses threats as an influence tactic. Esteemed individuals must maintain a facade of truthfulness or lose their esteem. If targets associate esteem with truthfulness, then threats from a highly esteemed source would tend to be believed, leading targets to overestimate threat credibility (i.e., the probability of punishment for noncompliance) and to comply frequently. On the other hand, threats from a low esteemed source would have lower believability, leading to underestimated threat credibilities and infrequent compliance.

Method

Subjects

Forty males enrolled in introductory social science courses at United States International University volunteered to serve as Ss in the experiment.

Procedure

The experimental paradigm utilized a message-modified version of the Prisoner's Dilemma game (PDG), in which a simulated source could send explicit contingent threats to target Ss during the course of a mixed-motive conflict situation. Two add-subtract cumulative counters provided the presentation of

CG 006 637

full feedback at all times. Lights served as cues and prompters to program the events (PDG trial, threat message, simulated player's punishment option for S noncompliance). The matrix values were R = 4, T = 5, S = -5, and P = -4.

Following S's arrival in the laboratory, an experimental confederate (C) entered and a rehearsed esteem inducement procedure ensued.[2] Dialogue between E and the "low-esteem" C represented him as a student who was impolite (unskilled socially) and doing badly academically (intellectually unskilled). The "high-esteem" C was represented as a karate expert (skill in controlled violence) who had used his skill only once and then in self-defense. After the rehearsed scenario, E led S and C to the game cubicles and obtained pre-game impressions to check on the success of the esteem inducement.

All Ss were instructed about the nature of the PDG and the manner in which messages could be exchanged, and were informed that they could not initiate communications. When a communication light on the S's panel was illuminated, it indicated that the "other person" was sending the message posted on S's panel, which read, "If you don't make Choice 1 (cooperative choice) on the next trial, I will take 10 points away from your counter." When S received this threat, he was compelled to reply with one of three messages which announced his intentions on the next trial.[3] In all, 20 threats were sent by source C to target S over 150 game trials. Threats were spaced in a predetermined order to insure that the threatening messages would not become independent of the ongoing interaction sequence. For half the Ss, threat credibility was set at 100%--C punished all noncompliant responses (i.e., when S made Choice 2, the defection game choice, on the trial following a threat trial); for the other half of the Ss, threat credibility was fixed at 0%--C source never punished noncompliance. The C always made the competitive game choice (Choice 2) on threat trials. On the 130 non-threat trials, C cooperated 75 times and competed 55 times, establishing a 50% cooperative strategy over all trials.[4] The pattern of cooperations and competitions on non-threat trials was a predetermined random sequence.

At the conclusion of the game, S was taken to a testing cubicle and asked to fill out an Interpersonal Judgment Scale and a modified version of the Semantic Differential.

Results

The esteem inducement was successful and held up throughout the experiment, as indicated by the pre- and post-game administrations of the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. Both prior to and after participation in the conflict situation, Ss in the high source esteem conditions rated P as more respected ($p<.01$) and more intelligent ($p<.01$) than did Ss in the low source esteem conditions.

Both esteem ($p<.01$) and threat credibility ($p<.01$) produced significant main effects on Ss' compliance. In the high source esteem conditions, Ss complied more often than in the low source esteem conditions; Ss complied more often when the threatener was totally credible than when he never punished defiance. The interaction between source esteem and threat credibility was not significant ($p>.10$), but *ex post facto* comparisons of the four means indicated that under conditions of high source esteem, Ss were highly compliant irrespective of threat credibility ($p>.10$). In low source esteem conditions, Ss complied as a direct function of threat credibilities ($p<.01$).

On the post-game Semantic Differential, Ss in high esteem conditions rated the source higher on the Evaluative subscale than did Ss in the low esteem conditions ($p<.05$). Also, Ss in the high threat credibility conditions perceived the source as more potent than did Ss in the low threat credibility conditions ($p<.05$).

Discussion

Since the source's coercive capabilities and objective probability of punishing noncompliance were held constant within conditions, esteem for the source was logically irrelevant to the determination of the expected value of the threat. Additionally, the source always behaved exploitatively (i.e., made a competitive

choice) on threat occasions, precluding an interpretation of threats as cooperative signals. Nevertheless, the granting of esteem for the source directly mediated compliance to threats. Apparently, Ss in the high source esteem conditions overestimated the resolve of the source to punish noncompliance, over-riding objective threat credibilities, because they complied frequently whether non-compliance was punished by the source or not. Subjects in the low esteem conditions complied as a direct function of threat credibilities. Interpersonal impressions which were most relevant to esteem-inducement were respect, intelligence, and positive evaluation.

The main effect of threat credibility upon compliance is a frequent finding and can be best accounted for by assuming that subjects attempt to minimise their losses by avoiding the more frequent punishments of the highly credible threatener. The direct relationship between perceived potency of the threatener and threat credibility replicates a previous experiment in which the status of the source was varied, although inverse relationships have been found in studies in which the source was anonymous.

Footnotes

1. The present study was supported by Grant #GS-27059 from the National Science Foundation to James T. Tedeschi, Principle Investigator, and by a predoctoral fellowship from the National Science Foundation to the senior author.
2. The esteem manipulation was worked out in a pilot study conducted by Mrs. Marty Smith at San Diego State College.
3. Analysis of the reply messages sent by subjects was omitted due to space limitations.
4. None of the independent variable manipulations effected subjects' cooperation on the non-message trials.